

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 NEAE-00 SSC-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00

INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 SP-02 /029 W

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P R 271125Z APR 77

FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7190

INFO AMCONSUL MADRAS

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, PINR, CE

SUBJ: DEATH OF CHELVANAYAKAM, TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT  
LEADER

REF: COLOMBO 0529

1. SUMMARY: S.J.V. CHELVANAYAKAM, AGED 79, DIED APRIL 26 OF HEART FAILURE. AS PRESIDENT OF THE FEDERAL PARTY AND CO-PRESIDENT OF THE TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT (TULF), HE WAS UNDISPUTED HEAD OF THE ONE AND ONE-HALF MILLION "CEYLON" TAMILS OF SRI LANKA. HE HAD RECENTLY TURNED HIS EFFORTS TOWARD ACHIEVING A SEPARATE STATE FOR HIS COMMUNITY. HIS DEATH NOW, BEFORE A GENERAL ELECTION, COULD DISRUPT THE FRAGILE UNITY OF THE TULF, WHICH HAS BEEN PLAGUED BY DISPUTES WITH THE PARTY YOUTH LEAGUE AND THE TAMIL CONGRESS. END SUMMARY.

2. S.J.V. CHELVAMRYAKAM, 79 YEAROLD TULF CO-PRESIDENT, DIED APRIL 26 OF HEART FAILURE AFTER AN ILLNESS OF SEVERAL MONTHS. HE HAD BEEN INCAPACITATED BY PARKINSON'S DISEASE AND ALMOST INARTICULATE FOR SEVERAL YEARS BUT HAD RETAINED LEADERSHIP OF THE CEYLON TAMIL COMMUNITY AND THE RESPECT OF THE POLITICIANS OF SRI LANKA. HE HAD BEEN A MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT SINCE 1947

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WITH THE EXCEPTION OF 1952-56 AND 1972-75, THE LATTER PERIOD RESULTING FROM HIS RESIGNATION IN PROTEST AGAINST THE NEW CONSTITUTION WHICH DID NOT, HE SAID, GIVE A PROPER PLACE TO THE TAMIL LANGUAGE. HE WAS RE-ETACTED OVERWHELMINGLY IN 1975 AND HAD EXPECTED TO CONTEST THIS YEAR.

3. CHELVANAYAKAM TOOK THE LEAD IN AN ATTEMPT TO UNIFY THE

TAMIL COMMUNITY IN 1972 WITH A UNITED FRONT, COMPRISING HIS OLD FEDERAL PARTY, THE TAMIL CONGRESS OF G.G. PONNAMBALAM, AND THE CEYLON WORKERS CONGRESS (CWC), REPRESENTING THE SO-CALLED INDIAN TAMILS. WHEN THE FRONT CALLED FOR COMPLETE INDEPENDENCE FOR THE TAMILS IN MAY 1976, A LEADERSHIP TRIUMVIRATE OF CHELVANAYAKAM, PONNAMBALAM, AND CWC CHIEF S. THONDAMAN WAS ASSEMBLED. PONNAMBALAM DIED IN FEBRUARY (REFTEL) AND THONDAMAN IS NOW THE ONLY SURVIVOR.

4. PONNAMBALAM AND CHELVANAYAKAM WERE THE LAST TWO TAMIL POLITICAL LEADERS WITH A NATIONAL REPUTATION. THEY WERE PRODUCTS OF THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE ENGLISH-EDUCATED ELITE OF CEYLON AND THUS HAD A SOMEWHAT BROADER PERSPECTIVE ON SINHALESE - TAMIL RELATIONS THAN DO THEIR PUTATIVE SUCCESSORS. THOSE SUCCESSORS HAVE ENTERED POLITICS SINCE INDEPENDENCE AND SINCE THE SHARP DIVISION OF EDUCATION INTO SINHALA AND TAMIL "STREAMS" ALIENATED THE TWO COMMUNITIES.

5. THONDAMAN MAY CONTINUE AS DE JURE HEAD OF THE TULF BUT AS REPRESENTATIVE OF THE INDIAN TAMILS, HE IS NOT A CREDIBLE LEADER OF THE WHOLE COMMUNITY. NO POTENTIAL REPLACEMENT WILL HAVE THE UNQUESTIONED AUTHORITY OF CHELVANAYAKAM NOR IS ONE LIKELY TO BE ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTS OF THE TAMIL COMMUNITY. PERHAPS THE LEADING CANDIDATE IS 49-YEAR OLD A. AMIRTHALINGAM, A FORMER M.P., NOW GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE TULF. HE IS LIKELY TO BE MOST ACCEPTABLE TO THE MILITANT SEPARATIST YOUTH WING OF THE PARTY, WHO SEE IN HIM A KINDRED SPIRIT. OTHER POSSIBILITIES MENTIONED INCLUDE M.P.'S S. KATHIRAVELUPILLAI AND V. N. NAVARTNAM, AND TAMIL CONGRESSMAN M. SIVASITHAMPARAM. (MEMCON LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OF LAST WEEK WITH AMIRTHALINGAM AND KATHIRAVELUPILLAI FOLLOWS BY POUCH TO NEA/INS AND INR/OIL/B).

6. IF THE DEATH OF CHELVANAYAKAM REPRESENTS THE PASSING OF AN ERA IN CEYLON TAMIL POLITICS, EVEN THE DAYS OF HIS POTENTIAL SUCCESSORS MAY BE NUMBERED. AMIRTHALINGAM HAS SAID THAT HE BELIEVES THE LEADERSHIP OF THE TAMIL MOVEMENT IS RAPIDLY SHIFTING TOWARDS THE YOUTH MILITANTS. IF TRUE, THE YOUTH LEAGUE'S CURRENT DISPUTES WITH THE LEADERSHIP OVER THE DISTRIBUTION OF SEATS FOR THE COMING ELECTION WILL GIVE WAY TO MORE SUBSTANTIVE DIFFERENCES IN THE COMING YEARS. SINCE THE TAMIL CONGRESS, STILL AN IDENTIFIABLE SEPARATE CAUCUS WITHIN THE TULF, IS ALSO SHOWING SIGNS OF RESTIVENESS, THE FRAGILE UNITY OF THE TULF AND THE COMMON GRIEF OVER THE LOSS OF CHELVANAYAKAM MAY GIVE WAY TO FEUDING FACTIONS WITHIN OR WITHOUT THE COALITION.

REED

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## Message Attributes

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